CHRIST CHANGES THINGS March 28, 1965 John 4:7-15
IICorinthians 5: 11--17

What are the motives that make men religious? Why have you decided to allie yourself with the church of Jesus Christ? Why, among all the other options open to you, have you made organized religion a part of your life? Certainly a random sampling this mornigg would reveal a wide variety of motives and reasons. But behind them all, I am, sure would be something about salvation. As a matter of fact men have always searchdd for salvation. As soon as man began to think and reason, and to be conscious of himself as a free agent alone in a sometimes hostile environment, he realized that there is something more to life than what meets the eye. From the beginning man has not been satisfied with life as it is - and has expressed the unquenchable thirst in his heart for something more. The history of religions is the long story of man's search for that something, and I would suggest that it continues right up to and including the present.. In ourd own way each one of us searches for something in life he can lean on, something that gives us a reason for living, something in which we can put our trust and our faith. It is this search that has brought many of us to the locus of organized religion. We know, as men have always known, that there is an incompleteness about life as it is; an undefineable shallowness that prods us into a search . We know, as men have always known, that there is nothing ultimate about life as it is: that even our greatest achievements, even our homes and families, while giving us temporary satisfaction and peace of mind, fade away and leave us standing alone.

It is this search that I want to talk about this morning: the universal seeking after a salvation that has been characteristic of man in every age.

From the very earliets times some men have searched for their salvation apart from the mainstream of life. Extreme sufferring and hardship, human cruelty and recalcitrance have led many men down through the centuries to the conviction that goodness and meaning will never be found within the normal structures of communal life, but pnly in an intentional, deliberate negation of life. Thus - the ancient ascetics torturing the body in self immolation: the Hindu lying on a bed of nails staring into the sun, senses completey dulled and cut away from ordinary feelings and experiencing: the

the peopl e from the plight of a wandering band of homeless nomads when he made them a nation and gave them the land of Cannaan. Unlike other religious books the O.T. is not a literary prescrition for salvation: it does not attempt to describe the way a man should go about providing his own salvation. Rather it is an announcemtn- in the form of a long and involoved story, that salvation has occurred: a pronouncemt that God has already provided for man's salvation: and a simple admonition to the people of Israel to start acting like the saved nation of the Lord. Notice that throughout the O.T., Israel's status as the elected people is never dependent on ethical goodness. God is faithfull inspite of Israel's unfaithfulness: salvation is an established fact ~~that~~ apart from any worthiness on Israel's part.

The New testament is consistant with the Old in this matter. The N.T. announces that Gdd has dome somenting that firmly and finally establishes salvation within the confines of ordinary life. He has brought salvation to life by entering that life in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the burden of the N.T. Godpel:- that the saving work of God, that has been going on down through the centuries in the history of one nation has now been fully accomplished. In Jesus Christ God has brought the mystical reality of his Kingdom to bear on the world of men. To participate in this kingdom is salvation: it is a historical reality, not apart from life, not only after life, but now, in the very lifetime of fisherman, and tax collectors, soldiers and Pharisees.

This is whatbthe early Christians experienced . Soemthing new had happened to them: they couldn't always define what it was, but they knew that they had found the added dimension to life that all men search for, and that it was a foretaste of the eternal life ~~sa~~as man had always hoped he would achieve . For them, eternal life began now, in the present. This is the Good News that they announced in theor lives, and finally in the pages of the New Testament.

What ever happened to that Good News? Certainly we don't hear much about it today. Certainly Presbyterians don't go around talking about the salvation they have found in Jesus Christ. ~~Certainly salvation, per se, is not one of the most urgent concerns of the Church of Jesus Christ.~~ It's not that people no longer need or want salvation. I

age of church attenders throughout the nation? - again present company excluded! The largest single group conspicuously absent from the ranks of organized religion are the young adults: those who are not particularly thinking about dying at this point: those who have taken their search for salvation somewhere else.

The title of this sermon is Christ Changes Things: and if I leave no other thought with you I hope it is this: that Christ does change things: now, in the present: - not only after we die, although he surely does this too, but now in the world of work, play raising a family and findinf one's place in life. Charles Kingsley, a famous preacher of the last century once said: " If thou art not in heavien in this life , thou wilt never be in heaven in the life to come." This is the germinal Good News of Christianty that we mast understand. Salvation is now: the Kingdom of God has been established in our midst: and to miss it now is to miss it altogether.

I wish to draw from two scriptural passages to pursure the meaning of salvation, although at this point you should be seeing that the bredth of our topic is far to great to squeeze into the last part of one sermon. Writing to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul described the differenc eChrist makes, or salvation this way; " herefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creetion. The Old has passed away, behold, the new has come." And from the incident at the well involving the Samaritan women our Lord said; "Whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst: the water I shall give him will become in him a srping of water welling up to eternal life."

What does salvation mean? It means that with the brief appearence of Jesus Christ on the vast stage of history something new was created: at that pointin history soemthing new came into being that was not present before. Paul Called it a "New Creation." and when a man came to know Jesus Christ he participated in it and experienced it as if he had been created anew. Jesus told the Samaritam woman that this new creation was like a spring of living water that wells up within a person to quench his deppest thirst.

In other words the New estame nt proclaims that in Jesus Christ man's search for soemthing more in life has concluded. In him man can find that deeper significance and meaningthat otherwise is but a fond hope.

One final word. The Bible is a book about salvation. The latter portion of that book proclaims that Jesus Christ can change things for a man right now. But the Bible is clear throughout, that man is a free agent, and that the final burden of responsibility is ours. God has provided: the church witnesses to that provision: but in every genration: in every age, men must decide: "Shall I cast my lot with Christ? - Shall I experience God's new creation now?"

This is the great invitation of Christianity: not that God coerces us into anything: but that he loves us enought to provide for our deepest need, and to invite us to participate in his new creation.

As we approach the cross of christ, the event that cemented God's invitation in the history of the human race - let us hear thet invitation again, rememebring the Apostle's words: "If any man is in Christ he is a New Creation."